

National Congress of American Indians

Councilor Belinda Bardwell

Reno, Nevada 2013

Mid-Year Conference June 24-27

Monday-Travel Day due to Chicago Shutting down due to weather

Tuesday- **General Assembly**

Opening Ceremony

It was reported that there was, at the time of Yvonne Oberly's report that there was a quorum in attendance, 54 Members and 46 in attendance.

President Keel reported that he had made many travels across the Nation making visits to Tribes. He made mention of two visits in particular, Menominee's Forestry Program and Little River's Housing Department. He also stated that NCAI has continued to be active, in the arenas of unemployment, taxation reform, ICWA, and the protection of sacred sites.

Mark Trahant, Nationally renowned Native Journalist and Author

He gave a long presentation on the important role Native voters have when considering the need to "flip the house." We have the opportunity at every election to make a severe impact on the turn out. Since the reelection of Obama, there are over 200,000 new voters.

Jodi Gillette, Senior Policy Advisor for Native American Affairs, the White House

She reported that the VAWA and FEMA are two pieces of legislation that the Congress has made a great effort to work with Tribal leaders. It was said that the sequestration has hit many programs in its wake, but stressed the need for Tribes to make their voices heard in order to combat the dire consequences. Also spoke about the Ramah decision and again the need for Tribes to discuss and submit their solutions/suggestions. She said her administration will continue to work in support of ICWA despite the court ruling that week. She also feels ICWA will continue to protect Indian children. We (White House) need to maintain consistency in how we work with Tribal leaders. Tribal leaders need to continue to be at the tables and to be heard.

Sam Hirsh, Deputy Associate Attorney General, Department of Justice

- He reported an increase in Federally tried cases
- Directed to consult yearly with their Tribes, increased collaboration with all involved
- Prioritization of crimes to woman/children
- Increased funding as well
- Streamlined grant application process

They are working on solidifying positive change that will last through staff/personal change, so that their forward progression will not erode away in the future.

Kevin Washburn, Assistance Secretary, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior

He focused on the recent decision handed down by the Supreme Court and mentioned that states have been doing a very good job in their own ICWA cases and feels good about the Veronica case being sent back to its original state for confirmation. The Interior is focusing on a better and stronger solution concerning ICWA, first priority. They are also working on the implementation of VAWA with its pilot policy. He also spoke about the Tribes doing a great job in reacting and creating great defensive moves when working with the Federal Government and how disappointing it is that we, as Tribes, are always having to be on defensive as opposed to being on the offensive when it comes to policy changes and legislation. We are always “putting out fires.” They continue to restore Tribal lands once the Patchek Patch is in place. Other areas they have made headway in are: water settlements, advancing Indian education, promoting self-governance, and Federal recognition regulations which have been rolled out that previous Friday.

Wednesday-General Assembly

Morning Midwest Caucus- The morning started with our Midwest caucus where there was discussion on several topics. One of them being the importance to the voting that will take place at the Annual NCAI Conference in Tulsa where many seats on the board will be up for election. Also there was a report that was given on the newly created online master’s program on Tribal governance being offered in Minnesota.

General Assembly

Many reports were given on the accomplishments that have been taking place at different reservations/Tribes concerning Housing, Economic growth and endeavors, and community development.

Dr. Yvette Robideaux, Director, Indian Health Service

Much information was given in her report concerning the Affordable Care Act that have now been made for public release, but to summarize many advances have been made in consideration for the Native population in the United States.

- All Native Americans who are eligible for IHS services are exempt from penalties for not having health insurance when the ACA takes complete effect in 2014 (Hardship Clause)
- IHS services will now receive reimbursement for Veterans who received/receive services from IHS. Those reimbursements are now being received at those IHS clinics
- Through policy Native Americans who choose to purchase private insurance in 2014 will also be exempt from co-pays and deductibles

The ACA will create a greater opportunity for our clinics to generate a larger amount of revenue through our 3rd party billing abilities, and we need to focus on that part of the ACA. We have the chance to generate \$95 Million in 3rd party billing. Also it was stated that our IHS budget, due to the sequestration was cut from 4.3 billion to 4.1 billion, her department is trying to - minimize the crucial impact on Tribal communities. It was also reported that we only have less

than 90 more days till open enrollment; there have been much movement on Medicaid expansion as well. More and updated information can be found at tribalhealthcare.org

Thursday-General Assembly

The highlight of today was the report from our new Secretary Sally Jewel, Department of the Interior. Her speech was an emotional one where she gave us an insight to her experiences growing up in Seattle near a Tribal reservation. Her speech can be found on the NCAI website. I would recommend to anyone to take the time to view her speech.

All committees reported on their individual resolutions that were passed, tabled, or declined. At this point the colors/flags were retired and the conclusion to the 2013 Mid-Year NCAI Conference. Thank you for allowing me to attend.